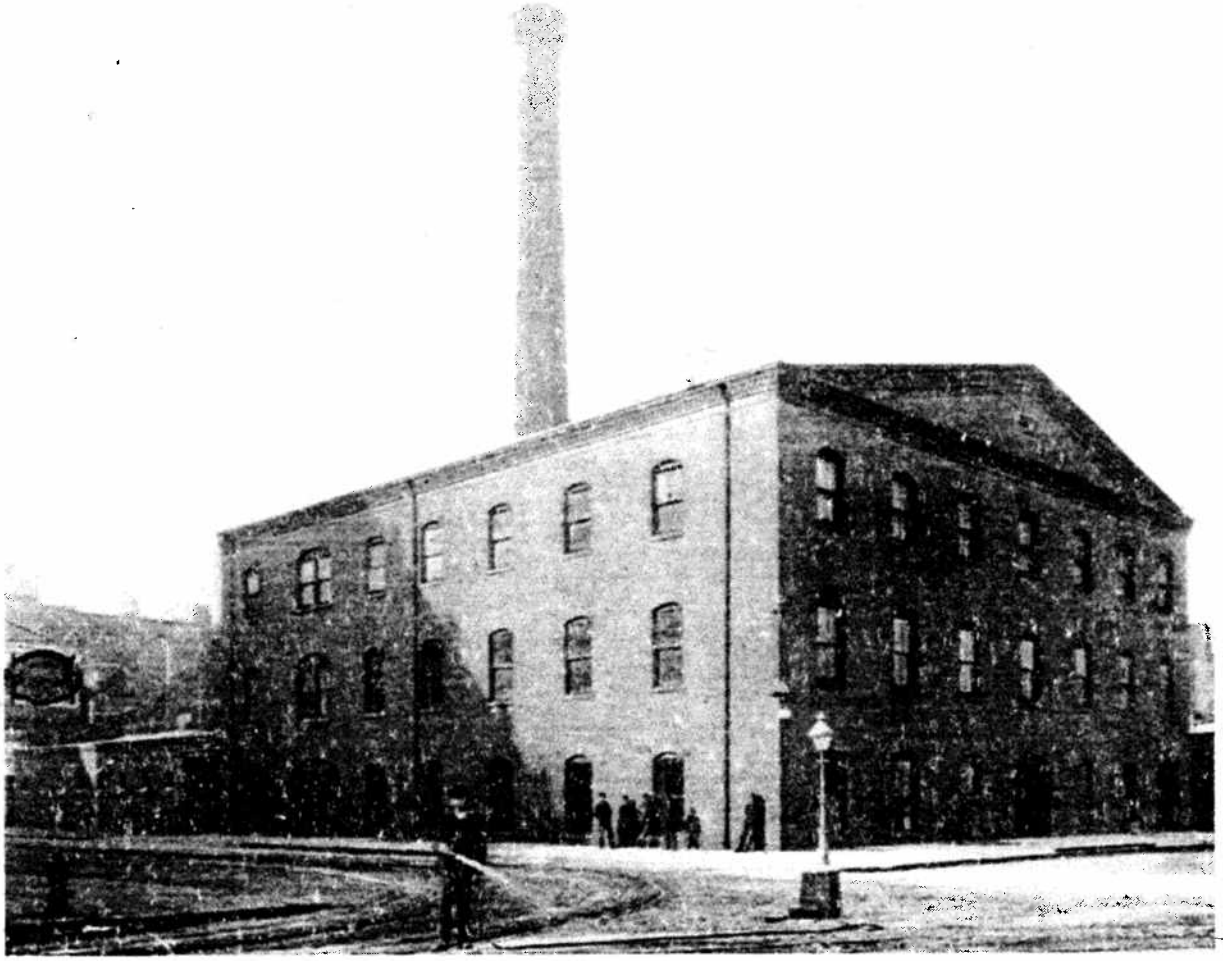
LANDMARK DESIGNATION REPORT



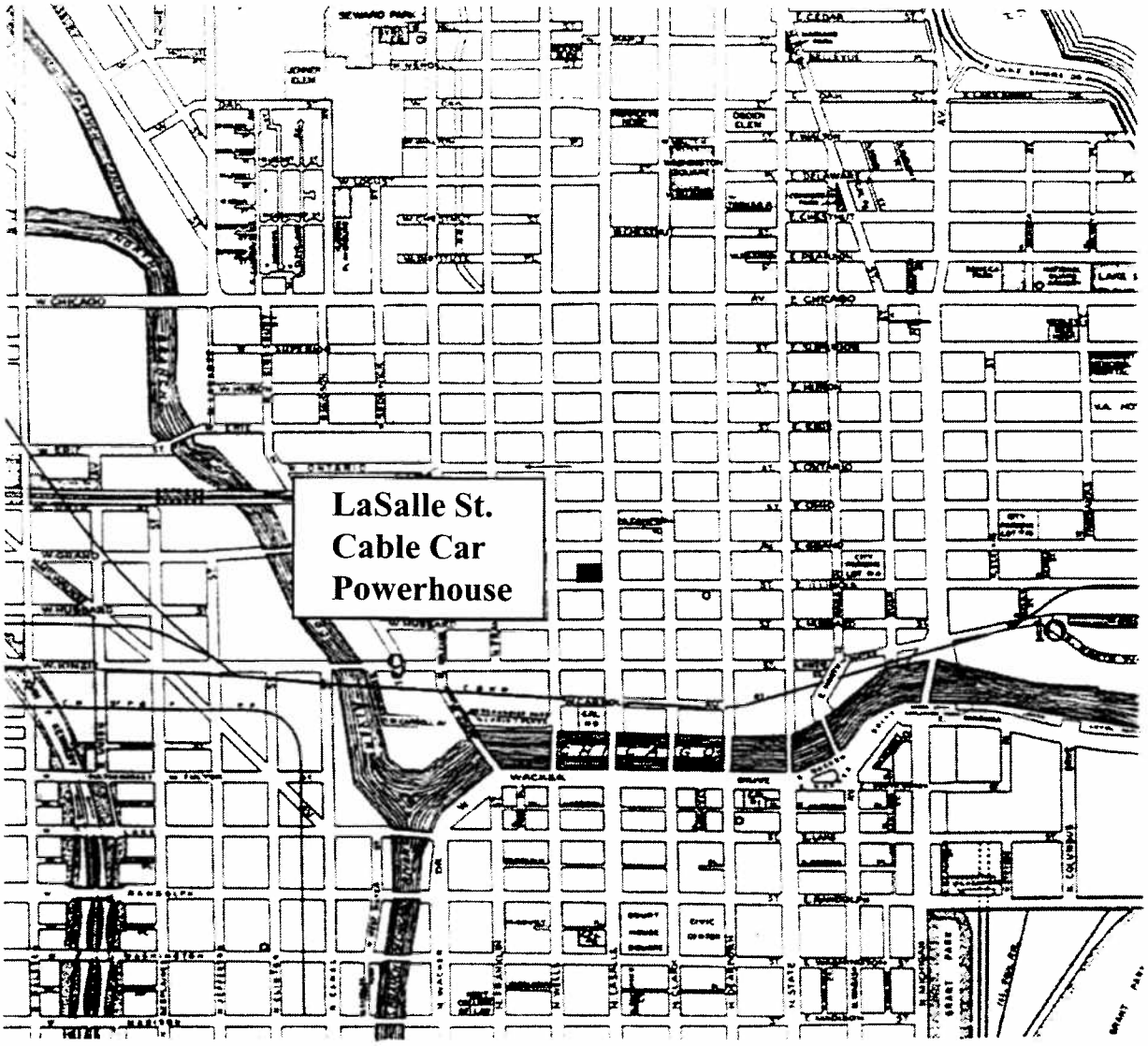
LaSalle Street Cable Car Powerhouse

500 N. LaSalle Street

Preliminary Landmark recommendation approved by the Commission on Chicago Landmarks, June 7, 2000

CITY OF CHICAGO
Richard M. Daley, Mayor

Department of Planning and Development
Alicia Mazur Berg, Commissioner



Above: The LaSalle Street Cable Car Powerhouse is located just north of the Chicago River in the River North neighborhood.

Cover: The powerhouse in 1897.

The Commission on Chicago Landmarks, whose nine members are appointed by the Mayor, was established in 1968 by city ordinance. It is responsible for recommending to the City Council which individual buildings, sites, objects, or districts should be designated as Chicago Landmarks, which protects them by law.

The landmark designation process begins with a staff study and a preliminary summary of information related to the potential designation criteria. The next step is a preliminary vote by the landmarks commission as to whether the proposed landmark is worthy of consideration. This vote not only initiates the formal designation process, but it places the review of city permits for the property under the jurisdiction of the Commission until a final landmark recommendation is acted on by the City Council.

This Landmark Designation Report is subject to possible revision and amendment during the designation process. Only language contained within the designation ordinance recommended to the City Council should be regarded as final.

LaSalle Street
Cable Car Powerhouse

500 N. LaSalle Street

Date: 1887
Builder: North Chicago Street Railroad Co.

Mention "cable cars" today and one immediately thinks of San Francisco, where underground steel cables are still used to pull vintage streetcars over the city's steep hills. However, during the 1880s and '90s, the nation's largest cable car network was located in another city—Chicago.

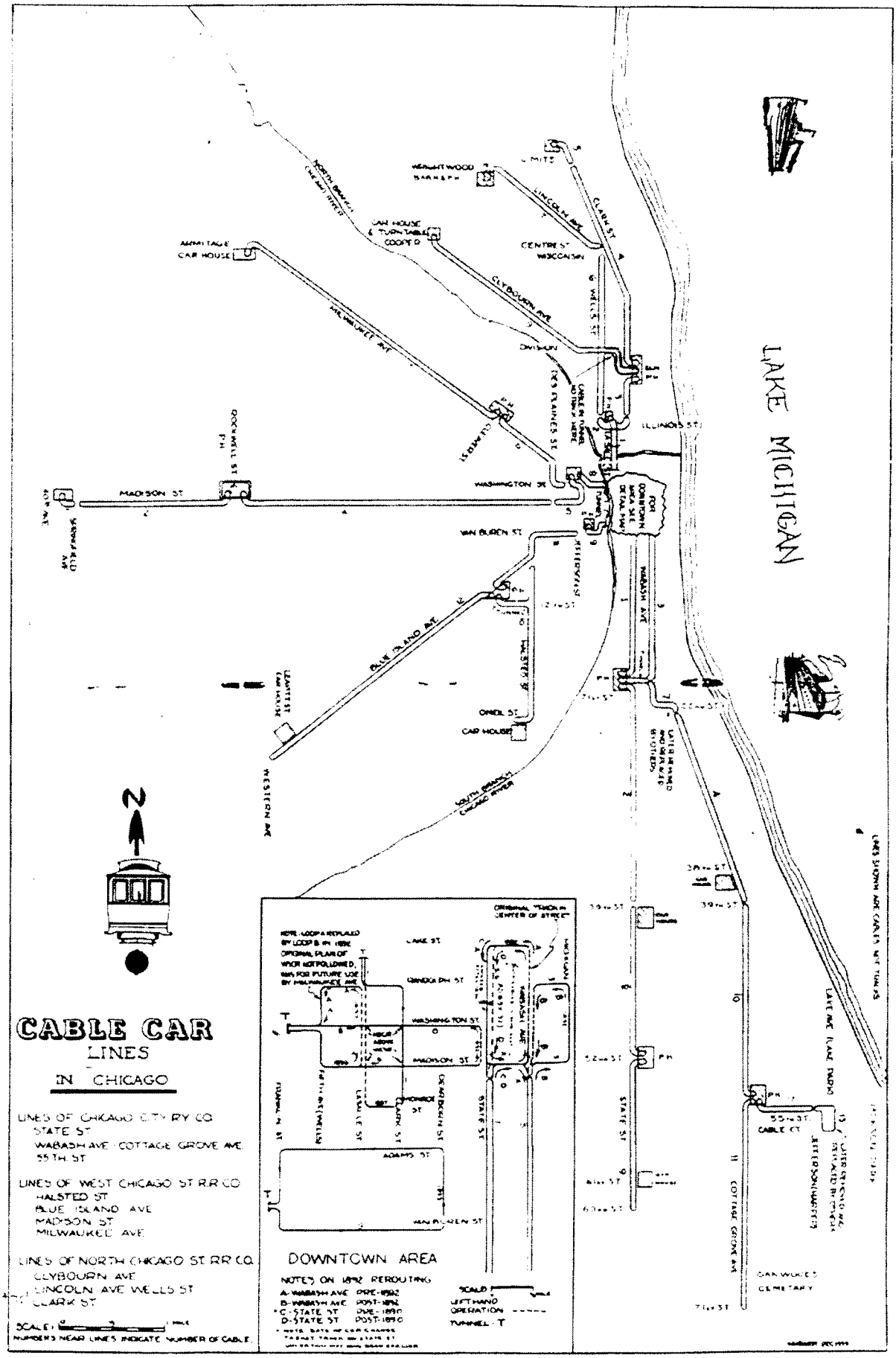
The LaSalle Street Cable Car Powerhouse is a rare surviving element of this city's once-extensive transit system. The powerhouse housed the engines that moved two miles of cable through channels laid in streets on the Near North Side and in the Loop business district. Those cables, in turn, pulled the thousands of cable cars that brought 100,000 workers into downtown Chicago each day.

Cable cars represented a major public transit improvement for late-19th century Chicago, both in capacity and speed over horse-drawn streetcars. They helped make possible the rapid development of the city's outlying neighborhoods during one of the greatest boom periods in the history of Chicago. As such, the powerhouse is a prominent reminder of this important period in Chicago transportation history.

The LaSalle Street Cable Car Powerhouse also is a distinctive structure of the River North area—known to recent generations as the home of two Chicago restaurant landmarks: Ireland's and Michael Jordan's.

Cable Cars and Early Chicago Mass Transportation

The earliest street cars in Chicago—wooden, open-sided cars pulled by horses—began running on State Street in 1859. By the 1860s, a number of horse car lines radiated from downtown


LAKE MICHIGAN
CABLE CAR
LINES
IN CHICAGO
LINES OF CHICAGO CITY RY CO
STATE ST
WABASH AVE - COTTAGE GROVE AVE
55TH ST
LINES OF WEST CHICAGO ST R.R CO
HALSTED ST
BLUE ISLAND AVE
MADISON ST
MILWAUKEE AVE
LINES OF NORTH CHICAGO ST. RR CO.
CLYBOURN AVE
LINCOLN AVE WELLS ST
CLARK ST
NUMBERS NEAR LINES INDICATE NUMBER OF CABLE
DOWNTOWN AREA
NOTES ON 1892 REROUTING
A-WABASH AVE PRE-1892
B-WABASH AVE POST-1892
C-STATE ST PRE-1890
D-STATE ST POST-1890
LEFT HAND OPERATION
TUNNEL - T
MADISON ST
WASHINGTON ST
LAKE ST
VAN BUREN ST
ADAMS ST
JACKSON ST
WABASH AVE
STATE ST
DEARBORN ST
CLARK ST
LA SALLE ST
FRANKLIN ST
MICHIGAN AVE
39TH ST
52ND ST
55TH ST
63RD ST
71ST ST
COTTAGE GROVE AVE
CABLE CT
OAK WOODS CEMETARY
CENTRE ST
WISCONSIN
CLARK ST
WELLS ST
LINCOLN AVE
CLYBOURN AVE
ILLINOIS ST
ONEIL ST
CAR HOUSE
BLUE ISLAND AVE
WESTERN AVE
SOUTH BRANCH CHICAGO RIVER
MILWAUKEE AVE
ARMITAGE CAR HOUSE
CAR HOUSE & TURNTABLE
HALSTED ST
MADISON ST
WASHINGTON ST
VAN BUREN ST
CLARK ST
DEARBORN ST
STATE ST
WABASH AVE
MICHIGAN AVE
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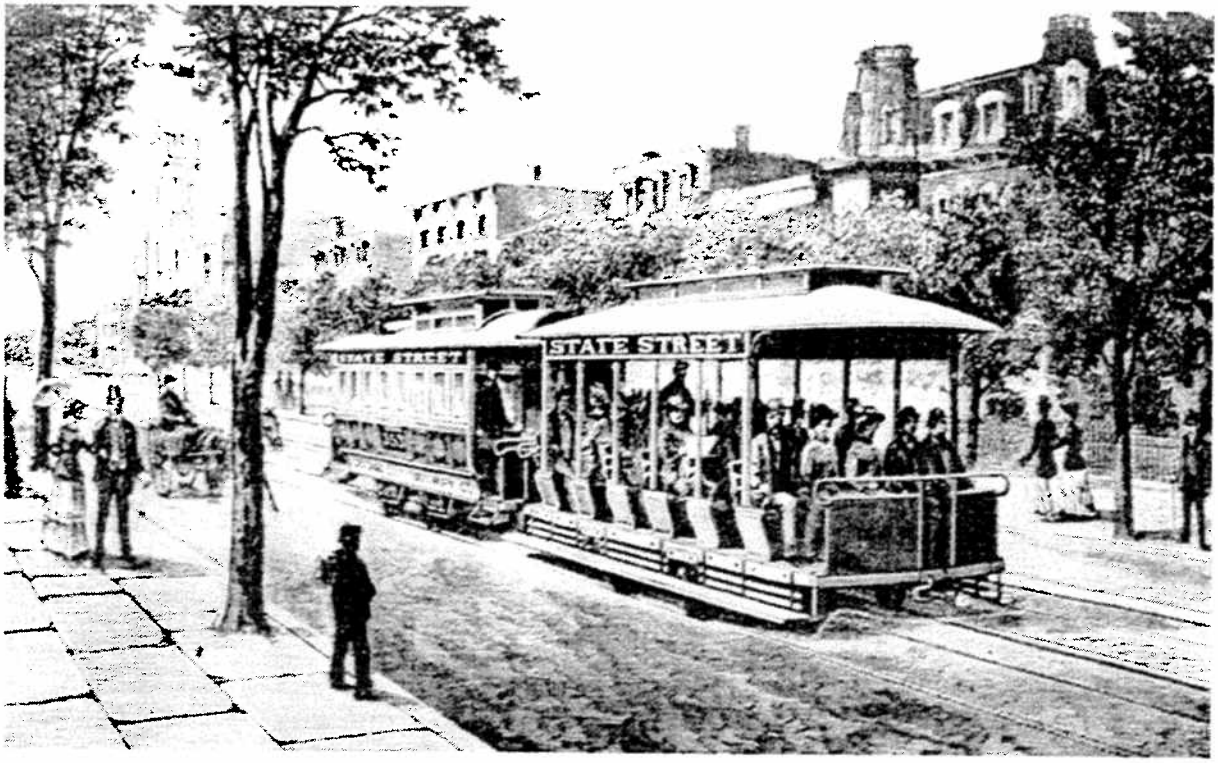
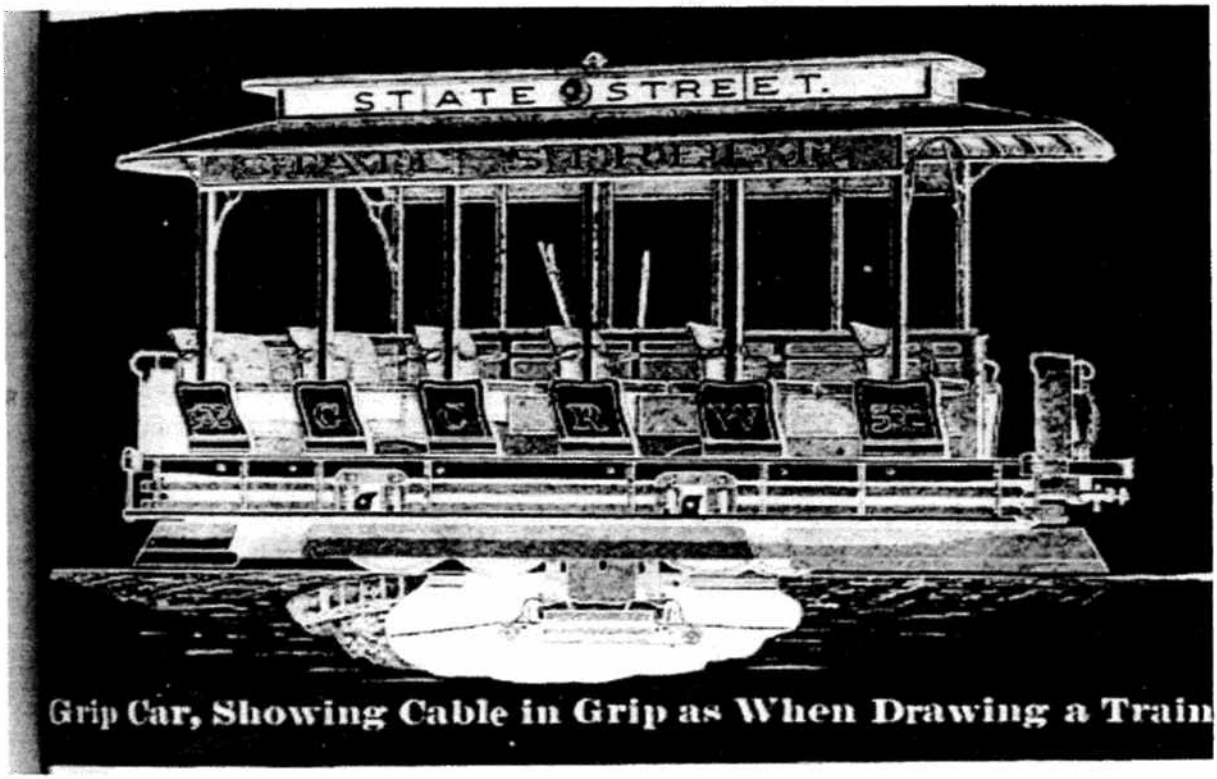
LINES SHOWN ARE CABLES NOT TRACKS





Opposite: Chicago had the largest cable-car system in the United States in the 1890s with 82 miles of track. Top: The first cable line was on State Street, which began operation in 1882. Cable car trains consisted of a "grip car" in front and one or more "trailers" behind. Above: A cable car moved by gripping onto a continuously moving cable laid under city streets. An operator, called a "gripman," used two levers, one that activated an under-car mechanism that held onto the cable and one that applied brakes.

Chicago, providing transportation for those without horses of their own.

However, horse cars were slow and undependable, limited by the speed and stamina of the horses themselves. They also were heavy polluters, leaving manure—and often the bodies of horses worked to death—to foul city streets.

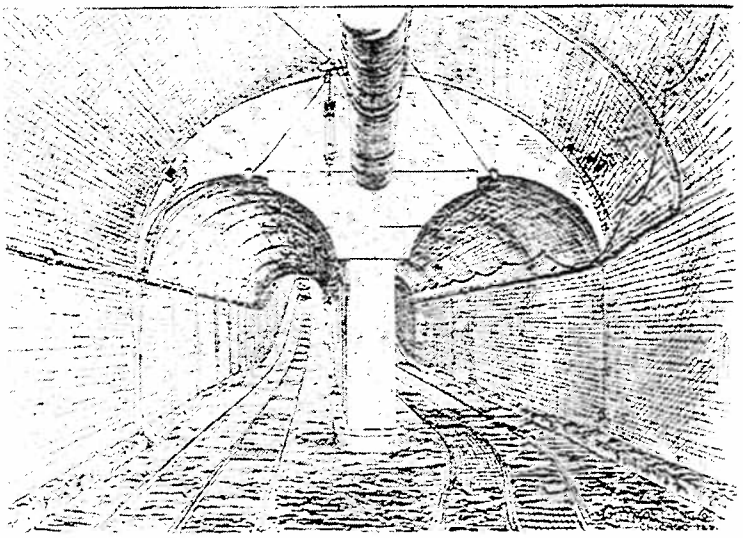
A solution came in 1873 when Andrew S. Halladie, a California wire manufacturer, invented the cable car as a replacement for the horse cars on San Francisco's notoriously steep streets. News of the transit innovation spread across the country. In 1880, a Chicago transit magnate, C. B. Holmes, the president of the Chicago City Railway, observed first-hand San Francisco's cable car operations. Convinced that a similar system would revolutionize Chicago mass transportation, Holmes installed the city's first cable car line in 1882. It initially ran along State Street from Madison to 21st Street, but was soon expanded to 63rd Street.

Charles Tyson Yerkes and the North Chicago Railroad Company

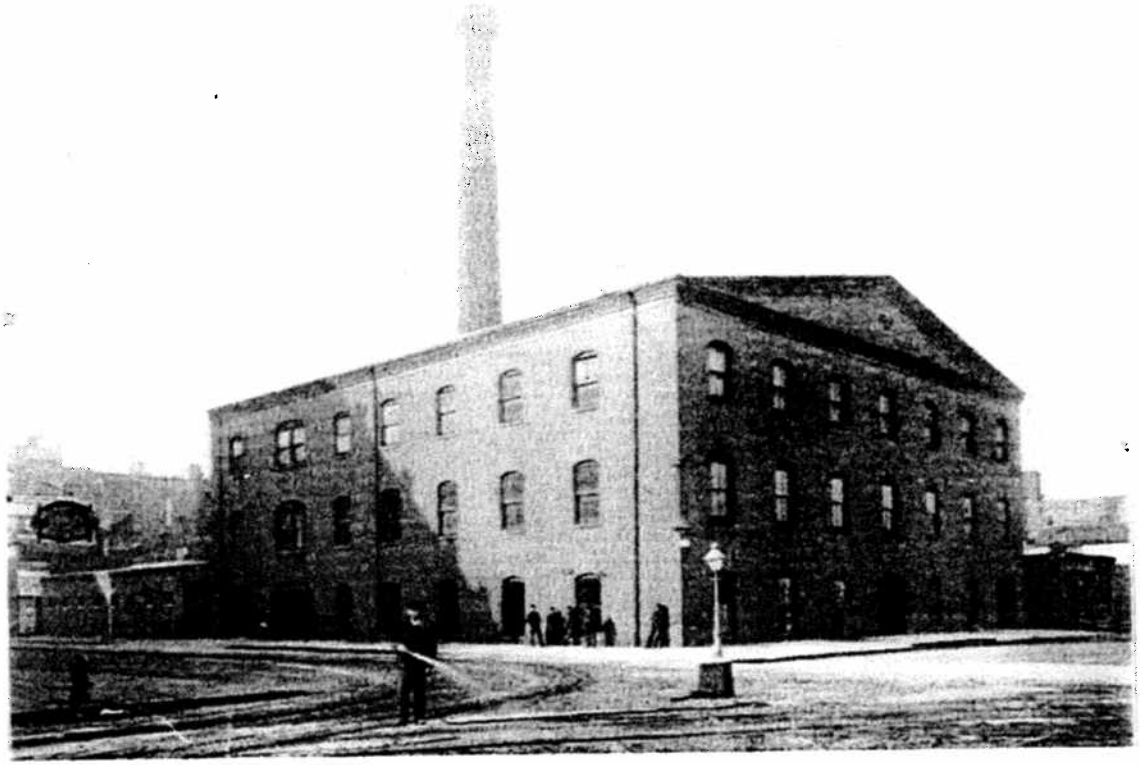
The State Street line served Chicago's South Side, which was the location of the city's premiere neighborhoods in the late nineteenth century. The North and West Sides had been slower to develop due to the natural barrier of the Chicago River. The river was a busy working waterway during the nineteenth century, plied by a steady stream of passenger steamers, freighters, lumber boats, and barges. Although bridges spanning the river existed from the city's earliest days, this heavy river traffic required their repeated opening, at times as much as a quarter of each day.

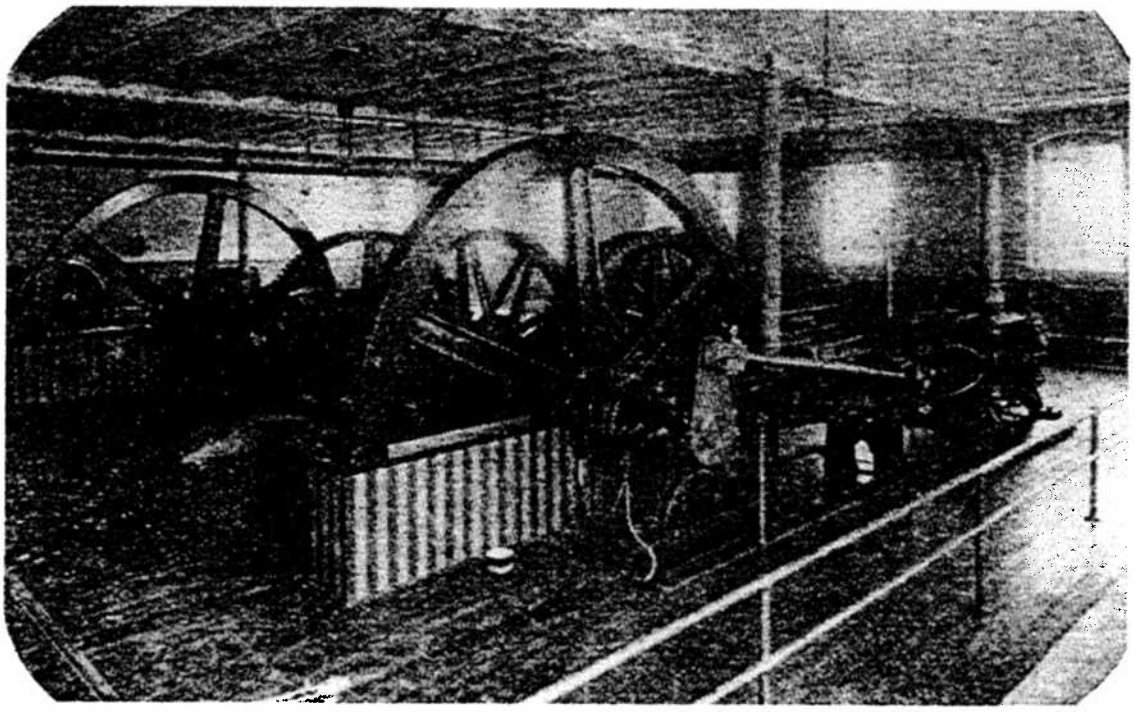
A Philadelphia-born financier and transit investor, Charles Tyson Yerkes (1837-1905) had come to Chicago in 1882 to work in banking. He soon saw the untapped development potential of these Chicago neighborhoods underserved by mass transportation and thought that cable cars were the answer. With the backing of several Philadelphia businessmen, Yerkes organized the North Chicago Railroad Company in 1886, which took over the rolling stock and other physical assets of an existing North Side horse car company.

Yerkes solved the river-crossing problem by acquiring control of a semi-abandoned pedestrian tunnel under the Chicago River at LaSalle Street. He refurbished the tunnel for cable car traffic, laid 21 miles of cable along Lincoln Avenue and Clark, Wells, and LaSalle Streets, and built three power plants to service the system. On March 26, 1888, the first cable cars entered downtown Chicago from the North Side through the LaSalle tunnel. Within a few years, the North Chicago Railway Company was transporting around 100,000 commuters daily from as far north as Wrightwood and Lincoln.



Above right: The North Chicago Street Railroad Company was started and operated by Charles Tyson Yerkes, a Philadelphia-born banker and transit tycoon. Top: North Chicago cable car trains (seen here in a photo taken at LaSalle and Randolph Streets) entered downtown Chicago through a tunnel under LaSalle and the Chicago River, then traveled on a cable "loop" along LaSalle, Monroe and Dearborn Streets, and Randolph. Above left: A drawing of the LaSalle Street tunnel.





Top: The LaSalle Street Cable Car Powerhouse in an 1897 photograph. Above: The powerhouse's first-floor interior was dominated by a pair of powerful Corliss engines, which operated both the main downtown "loop" cable and cables along Illinois, Clark, and Wells Streets on the Near North Side.

Yerkes went on to organize the West Chicago Railway Company to provide cable car service for Chicago's West Side neighborhoods. In addition, he expanded his control of Chicago mass transit during the 1890s through the creation of a large network of electric streetcar lines throughout Chicago. He also constructed the Union Loop elevated—today's Chicago Loop—which created a unified set of tracks for the city's elevated rail lines entering downtown Chicago.

Yerkes' near-monopoly of surface mass transit, accomplished partially through bribery of public officials, made him a figure of great notoriety by 1900, when he left Chicago for a new life in London. Ever the transit innovator, Yerkes oversaw the construction of several subway lines there before his death in 1905.

Building Construction and Description

Planning for the LaSalle Street Cable Car Powerhouse began in 1886 when the North Chicago Street Railroad Company received city authority to replace several horse-drawn streetcar lines with cable-drawn lines and began installing cables. The company then received a building permit on April 8, 1887, for a powerhouse, called a "machinery station" on the permit, at Illinois and LaSalle Streets that would cost $35,000. On March 26, 1888, cable-car service was initiated into the Loop through the LaSalle Street tunnel under the Chicago River. The company's cable cars were pulled by a 9,650-foot-long steel cable "loop" that ran from the powerhouse and underneath LaSalle Street, Monroe Street, Dearborn Avenue, and Randolph Street. (The term "loop" as applied to downtown Chicago, although long associated with the overhead Union Loop elevated tracks, originally derives from the several cable loops such as this one, buried under city streets, that allowed for efficient turnarounds by cable cars.)

The three-story powerhouse, originally set on a 100 by 113-foot lot, was a striking visual presence in the River North area, which was a jumble of low-scale factories, warehouses, and shipyards. The building's dominant feature was a broad, triangular-shaped pediment facing LaSalle Street, which was trimmed with detailed brick corbeling.

The two street facades (LaSalle and Illinois) were faced with finely textured, red pressed brick, while the alley and rear elevations were built of common brick. The original wood, double-hung windows have been replaced with green-colored metal-sash windows, but they retain their pressed-brick lintels and limestone sills.

Like many industrial buildings of the period, there is no record of an architect for the powerhouse. Apparently it was designed in-house by the North Chicago Street Railroad Company

and its contractor, the United States Construction Company, also a Yerkes-controlled business.

The powerhouse's first floor originally held two 300-horsepower Corliss engines, powered by oil- and coal-fed boilers, that moved both the main "loop" cable and the secondary cables that ran along Illinois, Clark, and Wells streets. The building also housed motors that powered the electric lights within the LaSalle tunnel. The steel cable entered the powerhouse through an underground conduit, which then turned on a large flywheel operated by the engines before exiting through another conduit.

The strain on cables was immense and they often broke despite constant maintenance. Horses were then used to haul cable cars while a broken cable was mended. These horses were stabled on the powerhouse's second floor.

Later Building History

The powerhouse served its original function until October 1906, when the North Side cable-car system was shut down in favor of electric streetcars. The buildings, however, remained the property of the Chicago Railway Company (the successor to the North Chicago Street Railroad Company).

In 1910, the company removed a 45 by 50-foot rear section of the powerhouse—at its northwest corner—to make room for an electrical transformer for the streetcar system. This transformer, stretching from the powerhouse to an alley to the west, remains an active electrical facility of the Chicago Transit Authority. (The portion of the transformer located on land once part of the original footprint of the powerhouse is included as part of this proposed landmark designation.)

In 1929, as part of the widening of LaSalle Street into a boulevard, the front 20 feet of the powerhouse building was removed and the facade was reconstructed to its historic appearance by architect Hugo Schmidt for the Chicago Surface Lines. From the early-1940s through the mid-1960s, the powerhouse was occupied by Loop Auto Service, a repair shop for automobiles.

In 1967, the powerhouse was converted into a seafood restaurant, Ireland's, which relocated from its longtime home on nearby Clark Street. This use was consistent with other building conversions in this area, which had become a distinctive off-Loop location for restaurants. (Gene and Georgetti's, 500 N. Franklin St., dates to this period, while the former Chicago Varnish Company Building, 33 W. Kinzie St., was converted to the Kinzie Street Steak and Chop House in 1971.)

In 1993, the building became the home of a very different kind of restaurant, a sports theme enterprise named for Michael Jordan, the star basketball player for the Chicago Bulls. During

In recent years the LaSalle Cable Car Powerhouse has housed restaurants. Top: Ireland's, seen here in a 1986 photograph, was a long-popular seafood restaurant. Above: The building more recently housed a restaurant named for the NBA basketball star, Michael Jordan.

the team's six-year reign as champions of the National Basketball Association, this restaurant became "Ground Zero" for live television feeds, public celebrations, and out-of-town visitors. Michael Jordan's Restaurant closed in 1999, a year after Jordan retired from the NBA. As of this writing (May 2001), the building was vacant.

Criteria for Designation

According to the Municipal Code of Chicago (Sec. 2-120-620 and -630), the Commission on Chicago Landmarks has the authority to make a preliminary recommendation of landmark designation for a building, structure, or district if the Commission determines it meets two or more of the stated "criteria for landmark designation," as well as possesses a significant degree of its historic design integrity.

The following should be considered by the Commission on Chicago Landmarks in determining whether to recommend that the LaSalle Street Cable Car Powerhouse be designated as a Chicago Landmark

Criterion 1: Critical Part of the City s History

Its value as an example of the architectural, cultural, economic, historic, social, or other aspect of the heritage of the City of Chicago, State of Illinois or the United States.

- The LaSalle Street Cable Car Powerhouse is a rare surviving building from Chicago's cable car system, which was the second oldest in the United States. At its peak in the 1890s, Chicago's cable car network was the largest in the country, operating thousands of cable cars over 82 miles of track. This powerhouse was an integral part of the city's cable car network.

- This building represents an important aspect of Chicago's economic and social heritage. By providing the power to pull the cable cars through the LaSalle Street tunnel under the Chicago River, it served as *the* link between the Loop business district and the North Side. Cable car service had replaced horse-drawn streetcars and its speed and greater capacity played a key role in the real-estate development of the city's North Side by improving public transportation between the Loop and sparsely developed outlying areas. At the peak of its operation, the powerhouse moved approximately 100,000 passengers aboard 4,500 cable cars every day from the North Side into downtown Chicago.

Criterion 3: Important Person

Its identification with a person or persons who significantly contributed to the architectural, cultural, economic, historic, social, or other aspect of the development of the City of Chicago, State of Illinois or the United States.

- The LaSalle Street Cable Car Powerhouse is among the few surviving buildings from the street railway empire of Charles Tyson Yerkes, who was the leading transit entrepreneur in Chicago during the late-19th century. The powerhouse was built for the North Chicago Street Railroad Company, which was the first street railway company organized by Yerkes, who eventually controlled eight separate street railway companies and 250 miles of track in Chicago.

Criterion 4: Important Architecture

Its exemplification of an architectural type or style distinguished by innovation, rarity, uniqueness, or overall quality of design, detail, materials or craftsmanship.

- The LaSalle Street Cable Car Powerhouse is a rare surviving Chicago example of a nineteenth-century industrial building designed for mass transit purposes, in this case serving the city's once-extensive cable car system. Only one other powerhouse—of the 11 built for the system in the late-nineteenth century—survives. The other powerhouse, located at the northwest corner of Jefferson Street and Washington Boulevard, is smaller and has been greatly altered. Consequently, the LaSalle Street building best exemplifies this important aspect of Chicago's transportation history. In addition, only a few such cable car structures survive nationally. Most are smaller than the LaSalle Street Cable Car Powerhouse.

- Although an industrial building, the powerhouse exhibits excellent masonry craftsmanship due to its handsome pressed-brick walls and the decorative brick corbeling that decorates its roof line and a distinctive triangular-shaped pediment facing LaSalle Street.

Criterion 7: Unique Visual Feature

Its unique location or distinctive physical appearance or presence representing an established and familiar visual feature of a neighborhood, community, or the City of Chicago.

- The LaSalle Cable Car Powerhouse represents a

distinctive physical presence on Chicago's Near North Side. Its deep red appearance, prominent gable roofline, and location on LaSalle Street, a wide boulevard that connects the Loop with the North Side, combine to make it a familiar and long-established visual feature of downtown Chicago's streetscape.

- Generations of Chicagoans and visitors have viewed this structure as one of the city's true landmark buildings, due to its longtime restaurant uses—from the late 1960s through the 1980s as "Ireland's" and during the 1990s as "Michael Jordan's."

Integrity Criteria

The integrity of the proposed landmark must be preserved in light of its location, design, setting, materials, workmanship and ability to express its historic community, architectural or aesthetic interest or value.

The LaSalle Street Cable Railway Powerhouse has good integrity, retaining those exterior physical features most closely associated with its historic appearance and that convey its historic visual character. It retains its important masonry details, including decorative brick corbeling, brick headers, and limestone sills.

Among the exterior changes to the powerhouse during its 114-year existence:

- A 45 by 50-foot rear portion of the powerhouse was demolished for the construction of the 1910 electrical substation. Because that portion of the building is not visible from LaSalle Street, it does not impact the structure's historic appearance. The building's original tall brick smokestack probably was demolished at this time.
- A 20-foot-deep section of the east facade was removed for the widening of LaSalle Street in 1929, and the facade was reconstructed to its historic appearance under the supervision of architect Hugo Schmidt.
- Some original limestone sills have been replaced in-kind with new limestone.
- A fire escape at the north end of the LaSalle facade, not original to the building but installed when the building was converted to commercial use, was removed sometime after 1986 and the fire escape entrances were rebuilt as windows.
- Original windows have been replaced with double-hung metal windows. Entrance doors also have been replaced with metal doors. The broad-arched, westernmost entrance on Illinois Street also has stucco infill.
- Decorative awnings, banners and a basketball-shaped

billboard were added to the exterior of the building for Michael Jordan's Restaurant. Although these elements remain on the building, they are reversible and do not intrude on the historic fabric of the building.

Significant Historical and Architectural Features

Whenever a building is under consideration for landmark designation, the Commission on Chicago Landmarks is required to identify the "significant historical and architectural features" of the property. This is done to enable the owners and the public to understand which elements are considered most important to preserve the historical and architectural character of the proposed landmark.

Based on its preliminary evaluation of the LaSalle Street Cable Car Powerhouse, the Commission staff recommends that the significant features be identified as:

- all exterior elevations and rooflines of the powerhouse.

Included in this designation is the portion of the existing Chicago Transit Authority transformer that occupies land originally covered by the powerhouse. For design review purposes, this transformer will be considered a non-contributing structure and may be altered or demolished upon Commission review and approval of the alterations or new construction.

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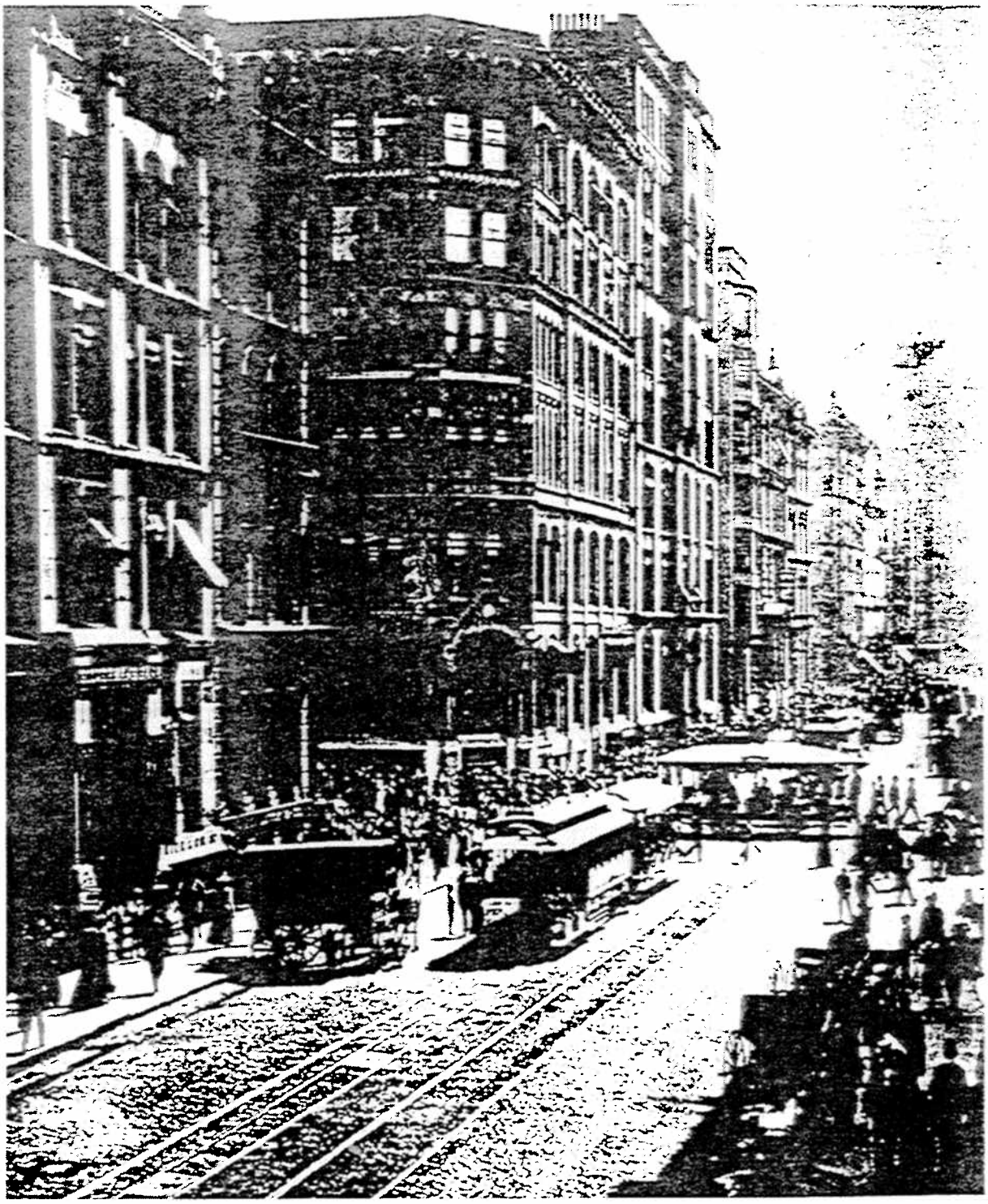

A North Chicago Street Railroad Company cable car train on Dearborn at Washinton in the early 1890s.

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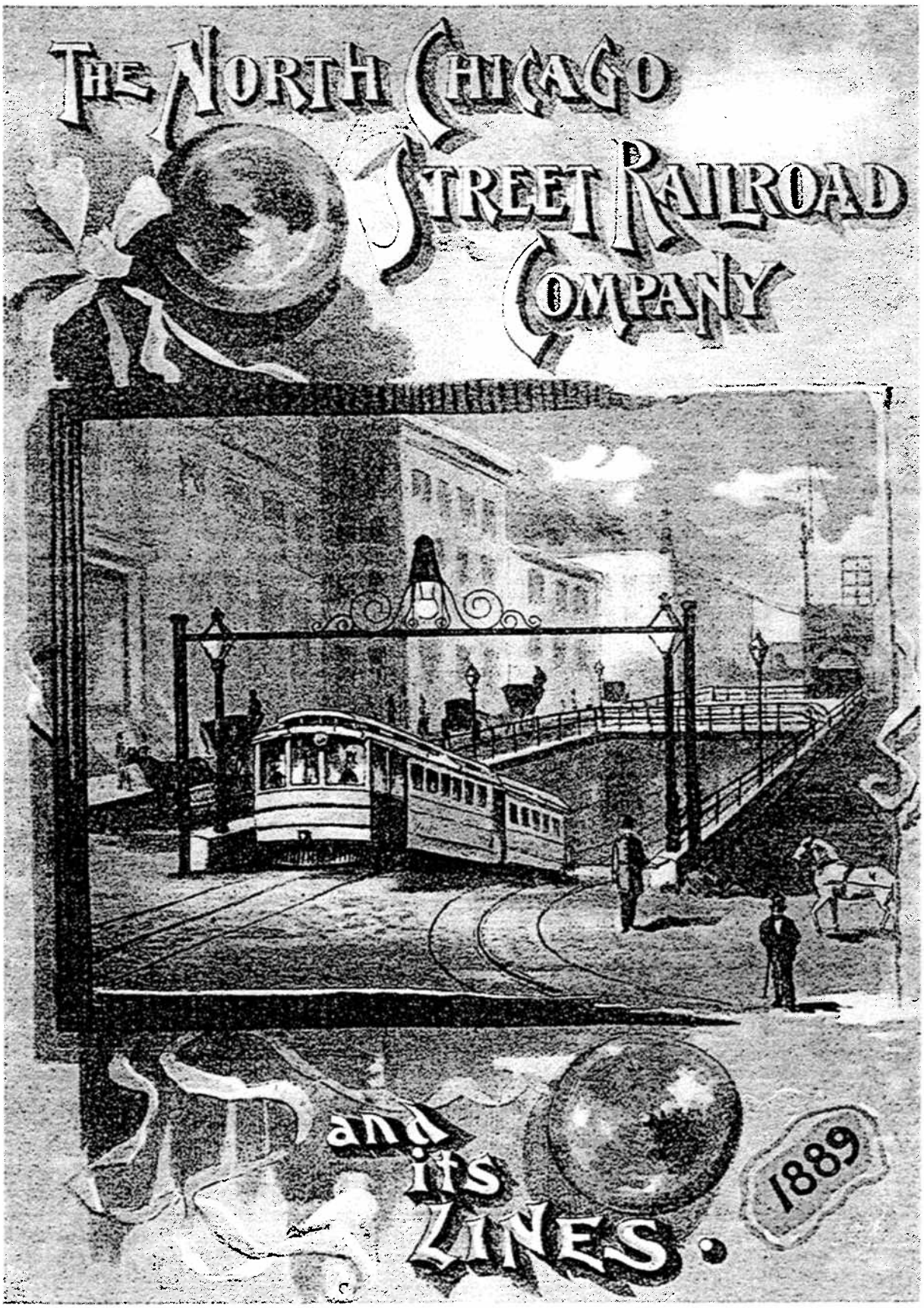
Illustrations
From *A History of the Yerkes System of Street Railways in the City of Chicago*: front cover, p. 6 (top).
From *Cable Railways of Chicago*: pp. 3, 15.
From *A History of Chicago*: p. 3 (top).
From *Chicago: Growth of a Metropolis*: p. 3 (bottom).
From *Chicago At the Turn of the Century in Photographs*: p. 5 (top).
From *The Cable Line, Illustrated, of the North Chicago Street Railroad Company*: p. 5 (bottom left).
From *Chicago and its Makers*: p. 5 (bottom right).
From *The North Chicago Street Railroad Company and its Lines*: p. 6 (bottom), inside back cover.
From Chicago Historic Resources Survey photograph files: p. 9 (top).
Terry Tatum: p. 9 (bottom).



The LaSalle Street tunnel entrance as seen in an 1889 North Chicago Street Railroad Company publication.

COMMISSION ON CHICAGO LANDMARKS

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